

AetherCon VI

FEATURING


PAUL IVEY

ROBERT FERGUSON

BRIAN FITZPATRICK

PLUS THIS YEAR'S FUNNIEST
GAMING STORY EVER BY THE OSK!

CONVENTION MAGAZINE - 2017

The background of the poster is a deep purple space filled with numerous small white stars. A bright, glowing white star with four prominent rays is positioned in the center. Several planets are scattered around: a small orange planet in the upper right, a brown planet with a blue ring in the middle left, and a purple planet in the lower right.

AethersCon

VI

NOVEMBER

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WWW.AETHERCON.COM

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Q&A: SHANE IVEY OF ARC DREAM PUBLISHING

This year, I get the pleasure of pestering a new pair of game-makers. Shane Ivey at Arc Dream Publishing, for instance, graced us with a bit of time to answer a few questions about their wide variety of gaming products & inspirational fiction:

M.J. Holmes: One link on your website leads to an explanation of 'What is a Roleplaying Game'; do you feel there is still need for clarification?

Shane Ivey: Most people coming to our website know what we make. But there are still people in this benighted world who have no idea what our favorite hobby is all about. I would rather a stranger learn what it is and why it's so great than click about in hapless confusion.

MJH: You offer a free .PDF on purchase of most of your published products; does this serve you well or proliferate the use of said products better than traditional sales plans?

SI: Our goal is to get our games on the tables of players who love them. Adding the PDF to a print purchase is just one more way to make that possible. We've offered free PDFs with our print books for many years and always found it worthwhile. Years ago, in fact, Arc Dream got together with like-minded friends in companies like Evil Hat, Pelgrane Press, Cubicle 7, and Rogue Games to found the Bits & Mortar initiative. That allows physical stores to offer our PDFs free to their own customers who buy our books in print.

MJH: What's your schedule look like for upcoming convention attendance?

SI: I don't go to very many conventions. They're fun, but hotels and plane tickets are expensive! I sometimes go to Origins. I've gone to ChupacabraCon in Austin, which is in May, a couple of times. It's a small con but always packed with my colleagues, so it's loads of fun. And of course I go to Gen Con, where we have had a booth for many years and run dozens of games.

MJH: Do you have a preferred rules system when utilizing the Delta Green & Old Ones Rising titles (CofC, et. Al.)?

SI: Definitely the rules set that we developed for Delta Green: The Role-Playing Game. That shouldn't be a shock, since we developed it specifically to do the things that we like to see at the table. It's derived from OGL editions of the "Basic Role Playing" engine that drives Call of Cthulhu and RuneQuest, which has been my favorite rules engine since the Old Ones first began experimenting with Earthly life.

MJH: Your store features merch based on Delta Green (windbreaker, patch, & pin); do you think player cosplay during game sessions attracts or detracts from the game itself?

SI: That depends on the players. I haven't seen it in person, but it sounds fun. Then again, the Delta Green merchandise is meant to be tongue-in-cheek. Wearing jackets and T-shirts that say the name of your blacker-than-black secret program is just bad operational security.

MJH: One of your products – The Kerberos Club – is a Victorian England-based Savage Worlds™ licensed setting; do you believe the title could be crossed with other licensed settings like Rippers or Gaslight or does it have the content to stand alone?

SI: Every edition of The Kerberos Club — Savage Worlds, Wild Talents, or Fate — features hundreds of pages of amazingly cool background on the setting at large and the Club itself, so it certainly is meant to stand alone. But that setting changes over the course of the 19th century, becoming more and more strange as outlandish superhuman powers become more prevalent. It's easy to combine it with other Victorian material.

MJH: ADP's products are not all Cthulhu Mythos by a long shot; should we expect more titles added beyond those currently featured, more additions to the title libraries, or even submissions from new talent?

SI: Certainly. We have a long list of projects that are in development or are waiting for development as soon as we have time. The core team at Arc Dream includes its founders, Dennis Detwiller and myself, and we've been focused tightly on Delta Green since its Kickstarter was such a huge success at the end of 2015. But our next projects will start coming to the public very soon.

MJH: What's up lately with the Delta Green Podcast?

SI: It's the podcast of The Unspeakable Oath, our magazine of Cthulhu Mythos gaming. The Oath has been languishing while the Delta Green RPG has taken all our time. With the Delta Green Handler's Guide nearing publication, we'll have a new issue of the Oath soon and new recordings to go with it. In the meantime, you can listen to Delta Green games run live — by me, with local friends — by signing up for Dennis Detwiller's Patreon account. He and I publish new material there every week.

MJH: With the rise of RPG boardgames like *Betrayal at House on the Hill*, anything in the pipe for the boardgamers out there?

SI: I expect so. We have spent a lot of time discussing possible board games, but we've never taken the plunge. Our next big project will be a card game, *Wrestlenomicon*. If that does as well as we expect, then a board game gets a lot more likely.

MJH: Apart from podcasts & .PDFs, any plans to get into the mix with mobile-friendly apps or materials featuring Arc Dream's titles?

SI: We don't have plans for that kind of thing right now. We've dabbled a bit, but those projects require too many resources for our taste. Web pages that generate new characters and so forth, sure, but anything you'd call an app is unlikely.

MJH: I noticed the store features paper marksmanship targets; have players enhanced their roleplay to such levels they take the game to their local firing range?

SI: If they have, I would love to hear the stories!

MJH: Everyone I interview gets a curveball question; batter up:

[Note: There was one, but it got lost somewhere along the email trail – some curveball! -MJH]

SI: I can only assume you wanted me to plug our latest publication. Everyone should check out *Delta Green: Extremophilia*. It's a new scenario of terror and strange discoveries available in PDF and in full-color paperback with a free PDF.

<https://shop.arcdream.com/collections/role-playing-games/products/copy-of-delta-green-extremophilia-pdf>

<https://shop.arcdream.com/collections/role-playing-games/products/delta-green-extremophilia-paperback>

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My thanks to Shane Ivey for his time and to my readers for theirs. If you'd like more information about Arc Dream try out the links above or go to: www.ArcDream.com

*Interviewing Mr. Ivey is M.J. Holmes; Author of Epic Fantasy novels "Tyme And Yon Serpent" and "Once Upon Tun'Rummal" with more of the series in development. He is also an illustrator for Beanie's Epics' "Camp Count*Down" (A picture book for toddlers learning to count).*

This interview and other ramblings are available at Holmes' blog and review website:

WhenRealityBurns.weebly.com



Q&A: GRANT DAGLIESH OF COLUMBIA GAMES

Anthony Boyd: What is your personal history with Columbia Games, and what is the arc of the company's history since it's founding?

Grant Dalglish: Tom Dalglish founded Columbia Games under the name Gamma Two Games in 1972. In 1983 it was renamed to Columbia Games. Grant Dalglish is Tom's son and has been involved in the company full time since the 1990s.

AB: How are the wargame and family game products proposed and developed within Columbia Games?

GD: Sometimes we work with outside designers such as Craig Besinque, Ron Draker, Justin Thompson, or Jerry Taylor. Usually designers conceive of the game subject and scope but they tend to adopt mechanics that are tried and true from previous Columbia Games.

AB: How innovative are your long-term fans? Do they engage in the making and sharing of their own games as you suggest via bulk block sales on your site?

GD: We have a creative group of fans. Inventing scenarios, variants, and expansions has been common since the early days. Most of these releases are freebies given away on www.columbiagames.com or www.boargamegeek.com. Occasionally they have become official releases.

AB: For the uninitiated, what is involved in getting into boxed wargame sets such as Victory, Julius Caesar, or Hammer of the Scots?

GD: The boxed games are always stand-alone and are easy to pick-up: minimal rules and a short learning curve. There are vibrant discussion forums and video reviews to watch to learn more.

AB: For parents without personal experience with these games, how are the age guidelines for the wargames set?

GD: 12+ is the usual guideline, though with parents' help younger kids may have success.

AB: What is involved in the ongoing development and publication of Harn products? Who have been the main writers and artists involved?

GD: We have a team of writers and developers based around the world who work with our artist to develop new Harn materials approximately 4 times per year. The team spans the globe from Europe to Australia and North America.

AB: What can a patron expect from a Harnquest subscription and what recommendation do you have for one just getting into the setting?

GD: We send our subscribers a new release at \$19.99 about 4 times per year. This can be in Print, PDF, or both and involves a nice discount on the regular cost. The additional benefit of a HarnQuest subscription is a 50% discount on existing PDFs. After a new release is launched via HarnQuest it is available for sale on www.columbiagames.com at the normal retail price.

AB: What on your thoughts on the relatively small number of system-neutral settings which remain in the hobby, and the dearth of settings as detailed as Harn?

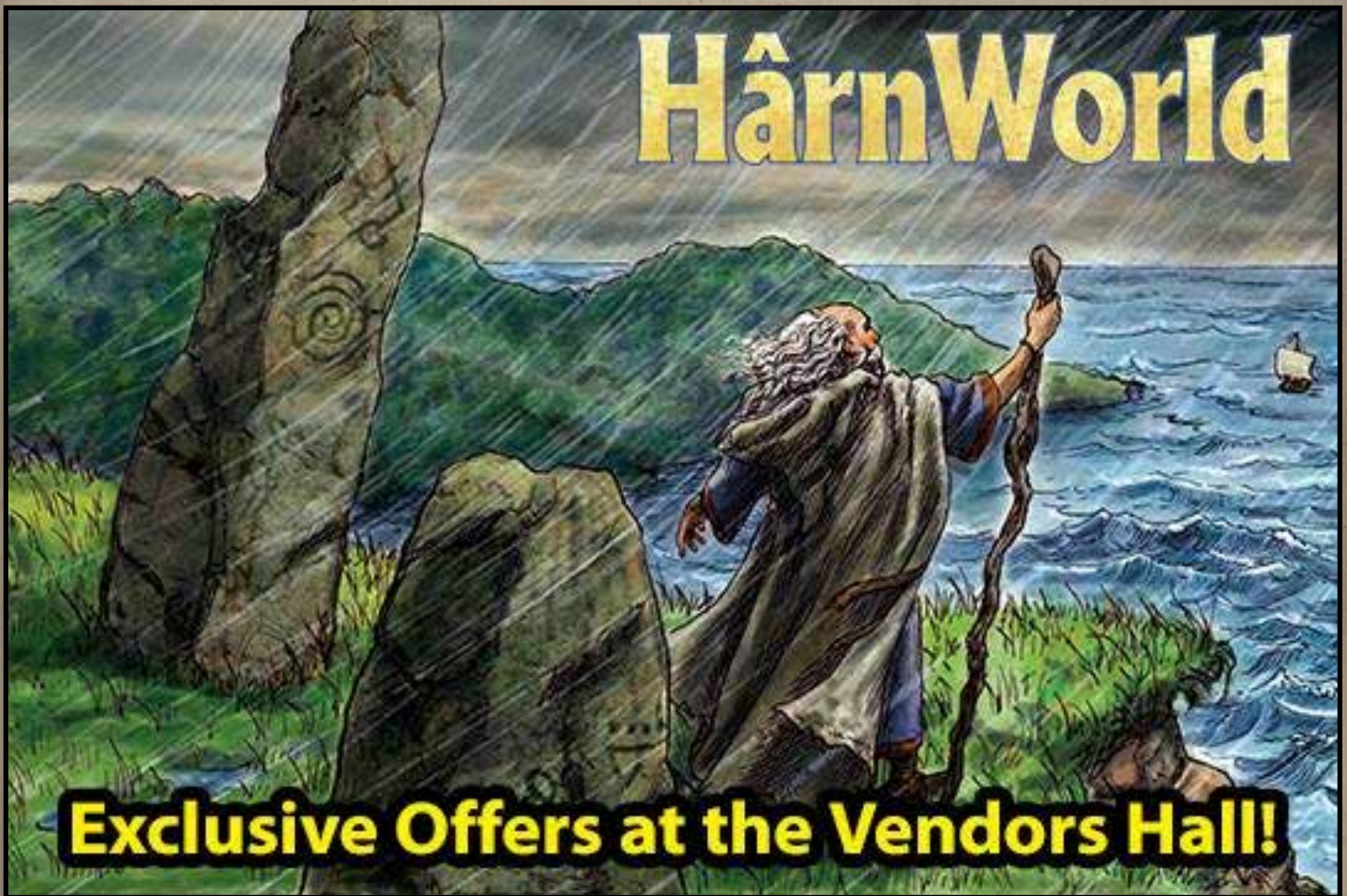
GD: The reduced number of system neutral settings should help Harn stand out as the go-to choice for gritty medieval gaming.

AB: One of the major new ways that gamers have been making use of to build groups and find people with the same interests is online gaming via video conferences. How much attention has Columbia Games been playing to the upswing in roleplaying game activity conducted via virtual tabletops like Hangouts and Roll20? Is this an area of interest for the company?

GD: Yes, we are following such developments with interest and have an emerging relationship with Roll20 and an active project in development using it.

AB: What is ahead for Columbia Games in 2018?

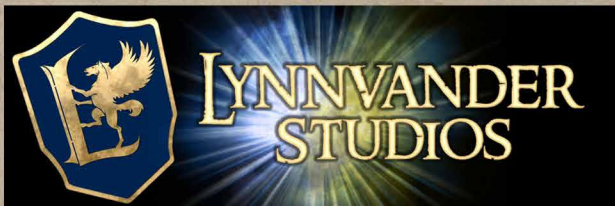
GD: An exciting year. We anticipate a continued uptick in Harn's popularity and expect to release 4-5 new modules. We will also be busy developing our latest war-game, Combat Infantry and its expansions.

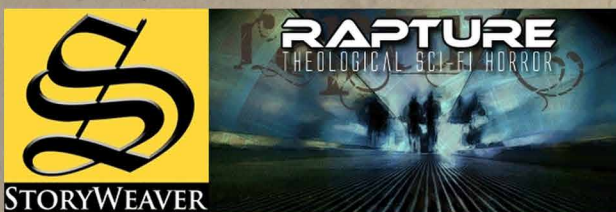


Interview by Anthony Boyd



VENDORS HALL





ESSAY

Lessons Learned about Kids and Gaming

by Brian Fitzpatrick



When the AetherCon folks asked me to write an article about kids and gaming, I have to admit that I briefly wondered if I was qualified. I've been playing role-playing games in some form since falling in love with Dungeons & Dragons in 1982, and I have two creative daughters I've been gaming with off and on for nearly a decade. Ok, so maybe I'm qualified.

What's funny to me is that gaming with my kids (and the kids of other gamers) has taught me quite a few lessons over the years that other folks may be able to use in their own games. And because it's a family affair, I'm having more fun role-playing and writing now than I have in a very long time. I must be doing something right.

So here are my five lessons for running games with and for kids that I hope will help you play more and more often with kids in your own life.

LESSON 1: PAY ATTENTION

As you might imagine, the attention span of some children may be less than some of the adults you've played with -- but don't let that scare you off. It's a bit of a boon and a bane. As a GM, it's your job to focus the creative energies of all your players on the task at hand, whatever that may be. Perhaps that's as complex as having them assault a small castle and rescue some kids from a fate worse than going to bed without supper or as simple as plotting how to, playing a gingerbread cookie, make it from one room to the next without waking the cat.

My trick to achieve this is to rely on their short attention spans as a strength. Restate the immediate problem, offer one or two possibilities, and see how they react. If they shake their head and mumble, that's probably not a road they want to go down. If their eyes light up and you see the energy return, you've hit upon something that may work.

It's a bit like fishing. You have to find the right bait to get the fish not only interested but committed to a course of action. If you can keep them dancing at the end of the hook, it's much more fun.

LESSON 2: LISTEN FOR THE PAUSES

Going hand in hand with keeping them interested in the events at the table is being able to listen to the inevitable pauses in the action. I ran a game of the Secret Lives of Gingerbread Men at my daughter's birthday party one cold afternoon in January and we had a room of nine kids, ages 6 to 11, with one boy and eight girls attend. And it was crazy.

I spent my time dancing from kid to kid, enticing one to lead the charge of their heroic band of cookies as they tried to make it into the ornament box, onto the tree, or onto Santa's cookie plate to survive the night. Some were very hesitant when we began. The silence was overwhelming. But I discovered that the quiet ones were the most creative. They came up with great ideas like calling on the Blue Fairy in the tree at one point to save a cookie who fell on the back of a sleeping cat. We had a great time convincing a cat to climb to the top of the tree with a gingerbread cookie riding on the back like a bucking bronco.

However, if I spent all my time dealing with the louder kids, I never would have heard some of the ideas the quieter ones came up with.

A corollary to this rule is to have ways to bring their attention back to the table when it wanders too far. Sometimes that's as simple as asking for a suggestion from a child who might not have been prepared to contribute something without a bit of prodding. And sometimes it's as difficult as wrangling the loudest kids to direct them in fun ways. In those cases, suggestions can work well to keep them on task, offering potential avenues to ponder while some of the other, less vocal players are doing their thing.

Get them all involved as best you can and make the storytelling a safe place at the game table -- you can get them to open up in new and surprising ways!

LESSON 3: BE PREPARED TO THROW IT ALL AWAY

No plan survives contact with the enemy, right? And just like gaming with bigger folks, sometimes you need to throw out the script and improvise to keep everybody engaged. Some of my favorite encounters have gone completely awry and morphed into events I will remember forever.

For example, playing D&D at our house with my kids and a whole family of friends (two parents and six kids), we had everybody around the table all together. I had written a small market into the adventure, but hadn't really decided what was going to be sold there or who was going to do the selling. Of course, the kids decided they wanted to go shopping. Suddenly we had a fruit stand, like in a farmer's market, and they were perusing his wares.

One of the characters was a bit of an amateur chef and always on the lookout for new ingredients, so we discovered that the merchant had starfruit at his stall. Negotiations began and before long, the character had a bunch of starfruit for the evening meal. Over the next few sessions, those starfruit came up again and again, along with potatoes and a whole host of other strange herbs, spices, and ingredients.

Two lines of throwaway text in my adventure prep turned into 30 minutes of roleplaying that inspired countless other events throughout the campaign.

Remember that first lesson of "Pay Attention"? Follow that attention wherever it goes. I promise you'll end up in some unexpected places.

LESSON 4: KEEP IT SIMPLE, BUT BE READY FOR COMPLEX

The KISS (Keep it Simple, Stupid!) Principle applies in my life everywhere I can use it. Too many moving parts usually gets me in trouble. And that works just as well at the game table.

With kids, you want to keep your plots fairly straightforward. Good guys. Bad guys. Talking. Working together. Fighting. Winning the day. Huzzah!

But it doesn't have to stop there.

The kids who wanted to shop for starfruit also had to stop a poor, innocent family from being kidnapped or killed in the lakeside village they found themselves in. And they did that admirably, but then they started asking the deeper questions. Why were these people being targeted? Who were the fish people trying to drag them into the water? What were they going to do with the people once they had them? Why now?

The kids were drawn into the mystery, even though they didn't want to admit it. Some of the characters were "love wolves," but others wanted to do what was right. And that led them into some dark places. I didn't push them there, but before long they wanted to stop the situation so it didn't happen again...

The interesting part for me was dealing with them failing to stop the sacrifice from happening. They did their best, but somehow that final battle got away from them and they were left wondering what to do next. Often there are unexpected lessons to be learned from these fictitious scenarios we cook up and they can lead to some great conversations both at the table and beyond it.

I'm always amazed at just how much some of those kids remember from those early adventures and how much they appreciated the complex bits as much as the simple ones. Don't underestimate the kids. They love a good yarn just as much as the adults do.

LESSON 5: JUST PLAY! KEEP IT FUN!

Ultimately, my goal with playing with my kids is to let them know that the game table is a safe place to have fun. We've never been too concerned with rules or winning, but we're always trying to have a good time and encouraging one another to tell good stories. If everybody is having fun, we are usually successful in achieving that goal.

There have been instances where I've had players suddenly go off the deep end and decide to have their PC attack another PC because they were tired of their insults. That wasn't particularly fun, but it led to a great discussion about consequences and keeping a good head on their shoulders. We resolved it without any in-game (or out-of-game) violence and moved on from there.

But it can be a tough balance to achieve, especially playing with families. Nobody knows how to push your buttons like a sibling, so keeping an eye on personality conflicts and adjusting seating arrangements when necessary goes back to the first lesson -- Pay Attention!

LAST THOUGHTS

No matter what game we play, we always try to keep things fun. Usually we succeed.

Playing with kids is one of the most rewarding things I've done over the last decade and it's energized every other aspect of my gaming -- from my own roleplaying to developing new games and stories. I never know what to expect when I sit down at a game table with my kids, but I'm always inspired by the time we're done.

Have fun raising future generations of gamers!



Q&A: ROBERT FERGUSON OF SCOTIA GRENDL

James Introcaso interviews Robert Ferguson of Scotia Grendel

James Introcaso: You have miniatures from everything from science fiction to fantasy. What genre is your favorite to design and why do you enjoy providing such a variety?

Robert Ferguson: Personally I like designing and researching information for the 1/300th scale landing craft and small naval ships. I just love the clean lines and variety of designs, not to mention the large variation between pictures of the class of landing craft type as used in the real world. I'm not sure I enjoy providing such a range of designs and variety of models, I just like designing the models which cause the large ranges to happen! I'm also really fascinated by some of the more obscure "what if" designs that either never made it into production as they were impractical or the war ended before production got underway (particularly with regards to the late WWII jet projects).

JJ: You have a lot of miniature skirmish games. When you design a miniature do you think about how it fits into the game first, or do you make something that looks great and figure out its mechanics later?

RF: The design usually comes first and from some weird idea or concept that one of us has come up with. It is very difficult to come up with original ideas nowadays as there are so many great designs and concepts out there. Once the models have been designed we then add rules and mechanics to the appropriate faction within the game. In the case of the historical models we produce this is less relevant as the models can be used in multiple games that use that particular scale of model. Scenery is often not specific to any one game but will go through a similar design process, and usually require no specific rules to be written.

JJ: If someone wants to jump into miniature skirmish games, which of your games do you recommend they start with?

RF: Personally I like the Urban War version, but the others prefer the Warheads. I suppose it's down to your own personal preference. I'm more into the design side of things. The game mechanics and playing are handled by Sebastian. The main advantage of Urban War is that a game can be played with as few as six figures a side, it does not require large gaming area, and it makes good use of terrain, something I feel is lacking in some skirmish games.

JJ: I love miniatures but I HATE to paint. What options are there for someone like me who wants to collect and play, but doesn't want to paint?

RF: Easy - get someone else to paint them for you (preferably your wife or, in my case, your daughter, who is now a way better painter than me). I like to paint scenery and "make" the bases. I have been known to barter painted scenics for painted figures or even sell some painted scenery to pay someone else to paint figures for me.

JJ: Your miniatures are so well-crafted, are their folks who buy them for reasons other than skirmishing games?

RF: Quite a few sales are to collectors (historical or otherwise). There are also quite a few people who just buy to paint/make dioramas, and there are a lot of sales to gamers who are looking for alternatives that are cheaper than some other named brands. I'd say the bulk of historical sales are to gamers creating various armies, and of course there are a lot of sales to gamers who want the figures for a particular game that we market. The scenery ranges appeal to a wide variety of markets as quite a few of them can be used in multiple gaming periods and game types. A pile of wooden crates is a pile of wooden crates and good for science fiction, fantasy, historical skirmish, or larger battles.

JJ: Take me through making a miniature from concept to getting it on the shelf.

RF: It all starts with either a whacked out idea (for fantasy and science fiction stuff), or for historical models an addition to the existing ranges, or a new item of equipment is produced (for the modern period), or a type model is currently unavailable. We then move onto research for historical stuff, or a design concept for the fantasy/science fiction stuff. After this point it is off to the sculptor (depending on the type of model we use different sculptors). I do most of the 1/300th and straight line stuff. We will often put up pictures of greens in process on the Facebook page just to show what is up and coming. Once it's designed, we'll make a master mould. This can be nit-rile rubber moulds for centrifugal casting or silicone moulds for resin casting. Sometimes we make a combination of moulds for



Scotia Grendel Productions

28mm Sci-Fi

15mm Ancient

28mm Scenics

28mm Fantasy

1/300 Scale Micro Models

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complex models or models that require both resin and metal components. Once the moulds have been tested and any faults corrected, we then cast enough models to make production moulds. At this point sample production castings will be sent off for all the IT work: photographing the model for adding to the website, weighing it so we can add the correct shipping weight to the shopping cart, sending samples off for review, posting previews on Facebook, and preparing the months newsletter with the new releases for that month and any other items of information, as well as any special offers to newsletter subscribers.

Jl: What's coming up in the future for Scotia Grendel?

RF: We are working on a couple of projects: more undead orcs (another 20 or so designs which will be being previewed in a month or so time), more WWII landing craft, and a mixed bag of 1/300th aircraft. In the xyston 15mm range, currently being released and expanded are the 15mm early Achaemenid Persians.

Jl: What's one thing you want the people of AetherCon to know about making miniatures you haven't mentioned yet.

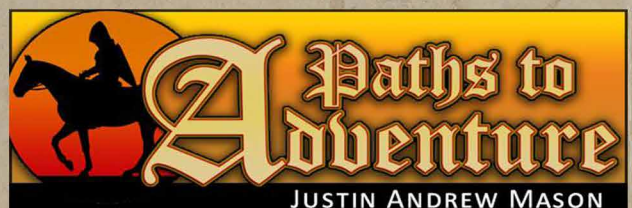
RF: The hardest thing to know (perhaps impossible to judge) is how popular a model or range of models will be when its actually available for sale. It is often a surprise to us about what is and is not popular. One of the things that still gives us the biggest buzz at work is the "birth" of a new model. This is when the master mould is first made and the very first castings of the model are produced there is always a thrill seeing something you have worked on become real for the first time.

WORLD BUILDER BLOG

Just a man and his homebrew worlds.

Interview by James Introcaso

PRIZE HALL







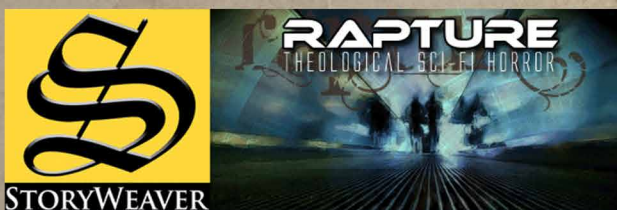
RAGING SWAN PRESS
RAGING SWAN PRESS



Terrains4Games



<http://terrains5u.nazwa.pl>



WANTED

RPGERS TO FORM A SWAG POSSE TO HUNT DOWN
AND BRING TO JUSTICE THE FOLLOWING PRIZES:

GM EARLYBIRD REGISTRATION BUNDLE

PLAYER EARLYBIRD REGISTRATION BUNDLE

RANDOM ENCOUNTER BUNDLE

ANVIL ALLEY BUNDLE

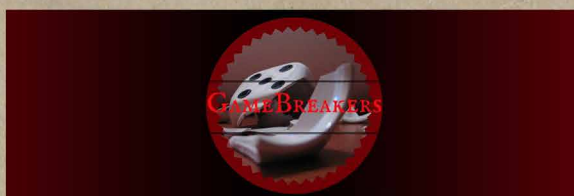
OPEN GAMING PRIZE TABLE

INNOVATION BUNDLE

CONVENTION PROGRAM BUNDLE

REWARD

PODCAST MODERATORS



HERE BE MONSTERS



HERE BE MONSTERS LEGEND



**Gerstovaex, the
Green Dragon**

Novogorod, Russia



**Black Blade
Mercenaries**

Hannover, Germany



**Krulg, the
Mountain Troll**

Trondheim, Norway



**Everleaf,
the Dryad**

Galway, Ireland



**Surkaiya, the
Mummy**

Istanbul, Turkey



Wildhoof Centaurs

Kiev, Ukraine



**Sssklyth, the
Great Naga**

Venice, Italy



**Kulkazyk, the
Frost Worm**

Reykjavik, Iceland



**Dark Orb
Witches Coven**

Budapest Hungary



**Bloodfang
Bugbears**

Madrid, Spain



**Bruxkah, the
Giant Crab**

Copenhagen, Denmark



**Harbacles, the
Vampire**

Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Q&A: JASON NELSON OF LEGENDARY GAMES

James Introcaso interviews Jason Nelson of Legendary Games

James Introcaso: Legendary Games has been leading the third party chase into Sword and Planet roleplaying ever since the Legendary Planet Kickstarter and now they're making awesome Starfinder products. How do you approach making one of these products as opposed to a straight up medieval fantasy or sci fi product?

Jason Nelson: Sci-fi is a really broad genre, so it's important to think broadly about what constitutes sci-fi. Something like Battletech or Firefly is entirely human-focused; there really are no aliens. Star Wars or Star Trek is very humanoid-centric, with a lot of humanoid alien races. The cosmic universe in Marvel or DC comics has a lot of humanoid aliens, but also a lot of very strange alien creatures as well. You've got the cosmic horror angle of Lovecraft or movies like Alien or The Thing, where alien things are purely, ALIEN (and almost always hostile). All of these can be elements of a great sci-fi story and setting, and in creating something awesome and fun for sci-fi you need to not pigeonhole yourself into thinking about it just one way.

We started the Legendary Planet project as a sword and planet pulp adventure saga, that focuses on alien worlds and planets and cultures rather than on flying through hyperspace in your starship. It blends John Carter with Thundarr the Barbarian in the grungiest parts of the Mos Eisley spaceport, linked by lostech Stargates. That's a very specific vision of sci-fi, one that feels a lot more like Flash Gordon than the Starship Enterprise, and one we thought then and still think now is a ton of fun to play and to run using a blend of elements of traditional fantasy-style adventuring (yes, there are space dungeons) with the tropes and trappings of sci-fi.

I learned years ago in my doctoral program that any given research project cannot be about everything. Don't just try to throw every bit of stuff you can think of in there, and don't try to make *THIS* project be the one that answers every possible question. Decide what it is the project is about, and let it be the best expression of whatever that is that it can be. There are a million variations of what sci-fi can be. Choose your vision and be true to it, and that's how you'll make it awesome.

JJ: Now that Starfinder is here, what do you have coming for that system? Do you have any plans beyond the Alien Bestiary?

JN: Our initial project focus for Starfinder was bringing the Legendary Planet Adventure Path to the new system. This is a massive adventure saga taking heroes from 1st to 20th level, with each new adventure taking the heroes to a new world of adventure. Each installment is set up like a traditional Paizo AP, with a big adventure, new monsters, magic and technology items, planetary gazetteers, bonus articles from authors like Sean Reynolds, James Jacobs, Tim Hitchcock, and more, and an ongoing fiction story series by Chris A. Jackson.

In addition, we've been publishing a series of ready-to-visit planets called the Legendary Worlds series. From fantastic asteroid hives to dreamlands of mystery and magic, you'll find fantastic opportunities for adventure for your heroes, with hooks to draw them in and detailed history, culture, geography, and some new surprises like new monsters and playable races, new feats, spells, class options, and other rules elements or even a micro-adventure. Sci-fi campaigns can be very open-ended, so whenever your players decide to go off-script and explore what lies beyond the next stargate or hyper-jump, you drop in one of these planets and boom, there's always a world of adventure waiting for them!

We're also working on bringing the amazing Aethera Campaign Setting to Starfinder. We co-published this incredibly detailed campaign setting (almost 600 pages) with Robert Brookes at Encounter Table Publishing and we want to bring the whole package to Starfinder and 5th Edition D&D. This setting blends sci-fi and fantasy with elements of art deco steampunk noir and cosmic horror. It features starships and high-tech gear formed by a mysterious mineral called aetherite, which spawned sentient robots called the phalanx and an enhanced race called the infused, but at the same time a mystic barrier seals the entire system from the rest of the cosmos blocking the influence of the gods and trapping the souls of the dead within the inky blackness of the void.

We also are working on bringing psychic classes to Starfinder, and also looking at bringing the Starfinder races and classes back to Pathfinder. There are plenty of folks interested in straddling the systems in both directions, and we're happy to make that happen!

JJ: Legendary does a lot of charity bundles. What is the best way for the gaming community to have a positive impact on the world?

JN: Pay attention. See what's going on in the world as a whole, and in the games industry too. Look for under-represented voices and find an avenue for them to speak. Look for unmet needs and find a way to do what you can. Don't let the perfect become the enemy of the good. Perfection is a great goal, but a troublesome strategy.

There are a lot of great people out there, and they might be interested in helping out in some way too. They might just need a push, and you might be just the one to give it to them. Team up and partner with others on charity projects to boost visibility for what you are doing. But if you've got a specific desire, then follow that one too. We did a big multi-publisher mega-bundle for Hurricane Harvey, but we also did a smaller bundle of just our stuff, the Heroes for Harvey Bundle on DrivethruRPG, because we had some specific charities we wanted to support. You can do both.

JL: Can we can a hint about things yet to come?

JN: We're broadening our focus to create more original content and casual games outside the RPG sphere, as well as some new independent projects we'll be talking about probably early next year. It's great to produce things for other RPGs like D&D, Starfinder, and Pathfinder, but it's also nice to have some things that are our own as well.

RPG products are still going to be our bread and butter, and we'll soon be releasing the Forest Kingdom Campaign Compendium, which we Kickstarted back in the spring. The Pathfinder version is already out to backers, and the 5E version is in layout now and should be done around the end of the month. This turned into a massive 424-page tome of monsters, magic, character options, spells, iconic heroes, complete adventures, and fantastic fey and forest-themed rules and systems for every kind of character.

Our next Kickstarter project will be bringing the next book in that line to life, the Pirate Campaign Compendium. Almost all of the writing is done for both the Pathfinder and 5E versions of that book and we are already ordering art and working on layout for the sections of the book that are already done. The whole idea of the Campaign Compendium series is to create themed campaign books that we can turn around and get quickly into your hands with fantastic quality that really brings home the fun for your game.

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WORLD BUILDER BLOG

Just a man and his homebrew worlds.

Interview by James Introcaso

Q&A: BRANDON WILLIAMS OF ARCANUM SYNDICATE

"It is foretold that great heroes will quest against the soul gates, to shatter the doors to the Spirit World and save our world from the clutches of thralldom. To save us all from the teeth in the darkness."

-Demon Gate

Anthony Boyd of the Casting Shadows blog and Runeslinger YouTube Channel caught up with Brandon Williams of Arcanum Syndicate in the wake of real world chaos to mirror the sort of imaginary chaos we create in our games.

Anthony Boyd: What led to the creation of Arcanum Syndicate?

Brandon Williams: I started out making my own systems at a young age and mostly for my own enjoyment as well as friends and family. As the years passed it became something that more and more people enjoyed so I figured I would try to do it professionally.

AB: How are the game products proposed and developed at Arcanum Syndicate?

BW: So far, many of the publications are products of my own design. Those that are not are created by writers that submit their work to me and are primarily for use with our own Chaos System and the universe it represents. We approve the work, set up the document, edit it, and add artwork to the product. Then the product is usually sold in PDF format, but this is soon to change to print on demand as well. I am not opposed to producing products that use other systems at all. It is just something that has not yet had time to unfold for us.

AB: What should a player expect from your game lines and what, if any, relationship do they have with each other? Will familiarity with Chaos 6010 A.D. build familiarity with Demon Gate, for example?

BW: What we tried to do with our games is create a great amount of diversity. A lot of races and character classes to choose from. I want people to make almost any character they want, if it is balanced. I wanted these core books to be all you really need to play the game. It was never about taking money from people, it was more about what is more fun. The books are packed with a plethora of information to give both novice and experienced game masters a lot of ideas. Both games thus far share the same universe and the same system. Chaos 6010 A.D. is set in a dark future while Demon Gate is set in a dark fantasy, as well as the distant past of the Chaos Multiverse.

AB: How do you view tabletop roleplaying games and how do you attempt to meet that vision with your games?

BW: I have always loved tabletop roleplaying games and how they help people in several different ways as well as being fun. It allows people to immerse themselves into a world and create their own stories. People can create some awesome worlds together. They also help with mathematics, writing, and even many other subjects depending upon which game you are playing. With our games, we try to stick to a certain genre classification but never is it so finely defined by that genre to where you could not expand and do whatever you really wanted to do. The system we have created to use for our games is more about fun than being easy or quick to get rolling dice out of the way. Can other systems get the dice rolling aspect out of the way faster? Yes, I believe so. Yet we built the system that we loved with a mash of different ideas that were the most exciting to deal with each situation. I personally do not mind rolling a few dice or a little crunch. We use different methods of dealing with situations like combat and skills and not just one basic mechanic, thus we called it the Chaos System. We also enjoy the war gaming aspect of tabletop, using miniatures and terrain during battle and mixing the two together.

AB: What is involved in the ongoing development and publication of your products? Who have been the main writers and artists involved?

BW: Thus far Brandon Williams, A.K.A Rogue has been the primary writer, designer, and artist of all the products. Yet a few other writers have jumped onboard to write adventures such as Dave Creely and Simon Smith. Adam Schmidt is an awesome artist who has been with Brandon on several products and is one of the leading artists of Demon Gate and Pray for Dawn. Chris Thompson also helped on the Pray for Dawn campaign module. Some other great artists that have worked on Demon Gate are Nele Diel, Adam

Black, and Michael Syrigos who did art for the Conan RPG.

AB: Demon Gate was funded through Kickstarter in October of 2016. What has the crowd-funding experience of that project been like for you, and how has it differed from your expectations?

BW: The Kickstarter was a rollercoaster and a stressful event to be sure. For an entire month you live at your computer in a marketing frenzy trying to reach out to who you can while trying to educate yourself on the process and watching the funds meter. I remember contacting publisher friends such as Oliver Shead of Immersion Studios, James Gantry of Rogue Blade Games who gave a lot of support and information to help me through the journey. At the time I did not know the entire process would take as long as it did to get the funding and get everything rolling. The production of the core book has cost well over \$2,500 more than budget and the time to produce the book has taken much longer than I expected. These are things I will ready myself for in future Kickstarters.

AB: As an independent publisher, what are the biggest challenges?

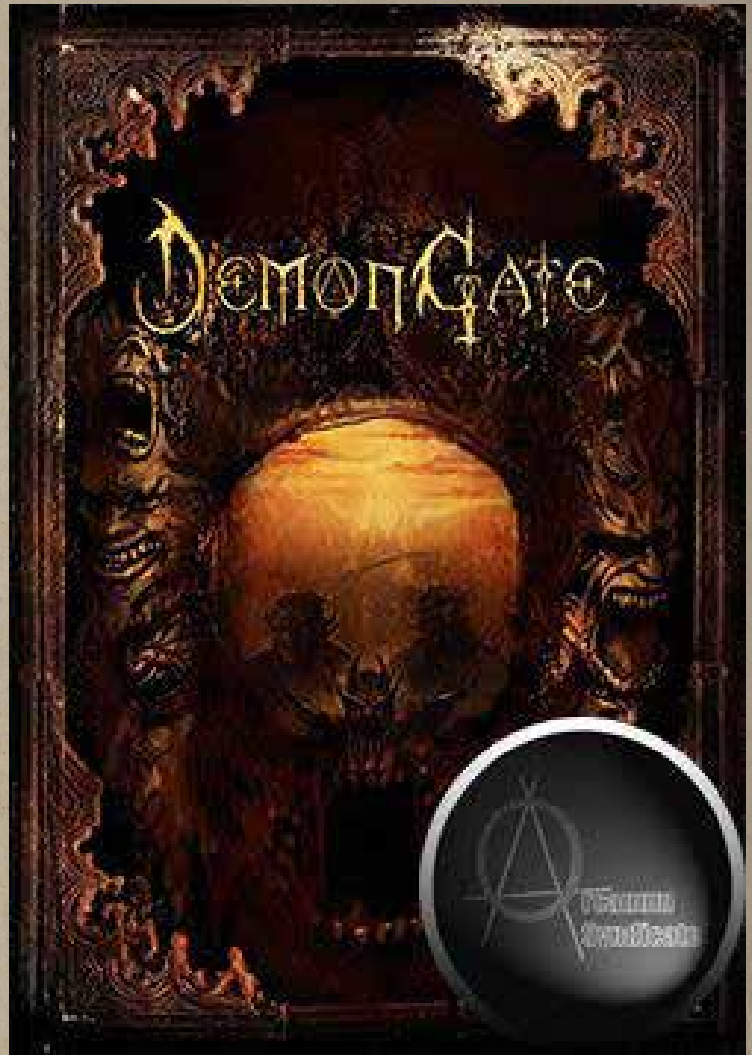
BW: The greatest challenge an independent publisher faces is getting people to look at your products I think, or getting the word out to the masses without being attacked for trying. A lot of tabletop gamers seem to find a game and stick to it, so it just takes time and the right moves.

AB: One of the major new ways that gamers have been building groups and finding people with the same game interests is by online gaming with video conferences, such as via Twitch and Live broadcasts via YouTube. How has Arcanum Syndicate been involved in gaming over virtual tabletops like Hangouts and Roll20? Is this an area of ongoing interest for the company?

BW: This is something we are just now exploring and I have recently started to deal with. For certain I love Roll20 and have just picked up a yearly subscription to start running games for people online. Many of the backers were promised some games and next month we are getting to that. At AetherCon I will be doing this very thing as well. I love this idea though and hope to be making videos and tutorials of our games very soon.

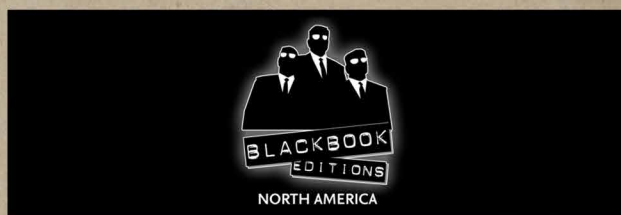
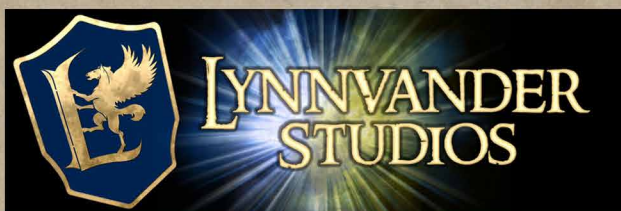
AB: What is ahead for Arcanum Syndicate in 2018?

BW: We have already started production and artwork for the remake of Chaos 6010 A.D. which is looking really cool. So, the Kickstarters is coming soon! We plan on changing the name of the game next year to something that defines it a little more like Demon Gate does. A Kickstarter will help to add what I really want to do with this whole universe. So right now, we are currently searching for a great name that will fit just perfectly for the cyberpunk/ dystopian/ science fantasy/ space opera mash that Chaos 6010 A.D. really is. As well we look forward to getting on Twitch and Roll20 to start gaming with fans.



Interview by Anthony Boyd

FEST HALL







Q&A: PATRICK KEITH OF BOMBSHELL MINIATURES

Noted terrible painter Christopher Hunt of the Game Nation Blog (www.d20radio.com) cornered Patrick Keith of Bombshell Miniatures (<https://bombshellminis.com>) to get you the big answers on little miniatures.

Christopher Hunt: First of all, congratulations on your 2nd place showing from Year One of the AetherCon painting contest. I've also got to compliment the painting on all the figures on your website. As an old hand at "tabletop quality", I can appreciate what goes into a competition quality painted figure. What's your secret?

Patrick Keith: I hire the best studio painters I can get. When we started Bombshell Miniatures I was already established as a recognized industry sculptor. That brought me lots of terrific contacts and people I wanted to work and collaborate with. I have specifically picked painters whose work I admire to paint our studio models.

That is not to say I don't know my way around a brush. I have several painting awards including a silver Skully from Privateer Press. You can see some of my work on the Warjack Factory entry in No Quarter #9. I just prefer sculpting more.

CH: What tips do you have for aspiring miniatures painters?

PK: The biggest tip is not to get frustrated with your own work. This is especially difficult to do when painting for competition. It's not life and death. It is supposed to be a fun recreational hobby. When you start adding pressure into the mix and frustration begins to overwhelm you, stop for a bit, decompress, and come back to it later. You will always see improvement, or a new way to do something you hadn't seen before.

CH: Bombshell has a very healthy Babes line of miniatures, with a wide variety of female miniatures from the "classic how is that armour?!" to more modern and sensible looks. What inspirations went into this line? What products from Bombshell are you most proud of?

PK: There are a few pieces that kind of stand out to me, ones that when I look at them it seems as if they are sculpted by someone else. I'm really fond of Wu Ling Shu with her dynamic pose and drapery. I also took a lot of time to sculpt her face with distinct Asian features. Qadira is another of my favorites for the same reasons. Another notable sculpt is Elizabeth Beckford. It's difficult to sculpt a mask successfully on such a small face and still have the character come through.

CH: Wu Ling Shu is definitely my favourite of those three because of exactly that dynamic pose. What goes into deciding on a pose for each figure?

PK: Actually, her design was based on art we commissioned from Izzy Collier who does a lot of the Reaper Miniatures designs. We wanted a character similar to the Tartar princess from "Flying Swords of Dragon Gate". So, she drew up a pencil sketch of the character and I sculpted from that. When I sculpt directly, meaning that it's not based on art, I try to find a pose that conveys the purpose of the character as if they are caught mid action. I find those poses more interesting than something more in repose, or that are standing idle. Sometimes I will look at reference of athletes in action and adapt some of their poses to a sculpt if I find it appropriate.

CH: Can you take me through the design process for a miniature?

PK: That's kind of really all over the place. Sometimes it is a commissioned sketch from artists I admire. I provide them with a brief of the character concept and set them loose to come up with a look. Sometimes it's existing art that I admire and I contact the artist for reproduction rights, like I did with the Chris Walton designs. Sometimes Vicky and I brainstorm and come up with a character and other times I'll sculpt something straight out of my head into the clay. I think that's what is most fun about it, all of the different sources of inspiration to draw on.

CH: So, I've got to ask. How did you come up with the name Bombshell?

PK: I wanted something evocative of a vintage heroine. Something more than a pin-up. A Bombshell transcends the static objectified figure and suggests something more, something of character, and playful abandon. Vintage Bombshells had character that made them



stand out, not just a package, but substance. The female characters I wanted to create in the Babes line are deceptively subversive. They are more than a pin-up and are packed with everything a male character would have. Even using the term “babe” as a brand, suggests one thing and delivers much more. To me it’s not a derogative, and more of an endearment. As a native Texan, I am used to hearing these endearments such as “sweetie”, “honey”, and “baby” for both genders not as a demeaning term of condescension, but more of a term of familiarity, admiration, and endearment, much in the way I address my closest male friends as, “dude”, “buddy” or “guy”.

CH: What’s next from Bombshell?

PK: We’re very excited to be scaling up our models for 2018. Currently we’re building a 1200 sq ft production shop in order to expand our resin casting setup. With that will come more sculpts in 75mm, 1/10th scale busts, and even some 1/8th or 1/6th garage kits. We will continue to produce “game scale” miniatures but are really looking forward to expanding into the display-painter and collector markets.

CH: It sounds like you’ve got some exciting plans for the future. Speaking of gaming versus display pieces, as a war gamer I must say I’ve had some very attractive miniatures which sadly suffer from “wobbly model” syndrome or refuse to get into the right position. How do you balance the artistic aspects versus the “playability” of a miniature?

PK: It’s a lot easier to do when working with physical materials. The majority of other models I’ve seen in the way of having balance issues have been from digital sculpts. It’s very difficult to judge the weight of the finished model and how that will be distributed across the center of the base with a digital sculpt. Sure you can eyeball the mass of the model and guess how it will sit in the composition of the pose. When sculpting with traditional materials, balance and composition are always at odds with real world gravity, so it’s much easier to gauge where the weight of the model will sit. I try to design a lot of my compositions around a spiral shape if possible. That way the model looks good, and the action is interesting, from a 360° view.

CH: Finally, I’d like to give you a quick soapbox opportunity. Is there anything else you’d like to add?

PK: I would like to extend thanks to you and to AetherCon for taking the time to spotlight what we do. It is often easy for smaller manufacturers to be overlooked in the growing sea of miniatures companies, games, and Kickstarter campaigns. Every opportunity to reach a new audience is a gift.

CH: Pleasure to hear from you, Patrick. Thanks for taking the time to share your insight.

Interview by Christopher Hunt



Q&A: TYLER OMICHINSKI OF LYNNVANDER STUDIOS

Gamer Nation Blog's (www.d20radio.com) Christopher Hunt caught up with Tyler Omichinski of Lynnvander Studios (http://www.lynnvander.com/) to talk board games, RPGs, and low magic awesome.

Christopher Hunt: Lynnvander works with many notable IPs for your board game line. Titles like Dragon Ball Z and Buffy the Vampire Slayer stand out to a 90s kid like me. What is it like working on such well-known IPs?

Tyler Omichinski: It's always a fascinating process. There's a number of stakeholders involved, and we have to ensure that people are happy. Fans of these properties have dreams and memories - we need to ensure that anything we do in these games matches the feel and memories they have of these games. When we had people play DBZ at GenCon, and one player raised both hands to throw down a spirit bomb, we knew that we were on to something.

CH: That's some solid playtest results! You guys have put out many quality board games. What can you tell me about Lynnvander's work with RPGs?

TO: That's a big part of the reason I was brought on board. I had a background in RPGs before joining this team, and they've had me working on these projects. Our first big RPG is being delivered through Kickstarter right now, Legacy of Mana. As a setting for Dungeons and Dragons 5e as well as Pathfinder, there's a lot of awesome new things going on. The Iltherian Knights wield anti-magic to take down magic users, Mutates are crosses between humans and animals, and there are even flying continents. It adds a ton of things to D&D to really add to your world. We've got three modules coming out soon that will add more to this world, and provide campaigns to play through.

We've got another RPG in the works right now, one that is still mostly under wraps. We're working on an RPG adaptation of a major IP that people are going to be gung ho about. I can't speak about it more right now, but we're hoping to have it released for GenCon next year.

CH: Regarding Legacy of Mana, as a diehard Fighter fanboy I will say the setting appeals to me! It sounds like this setting takes a big step away from the usual fantasy world, why should player groups check it out?

TO: There's some really cool things going on. It is a magic light setting, so if you have a wizard or a dragon born, the setting really encourages you to be a rarity. It is, however, a world that used to have plenty of magic, so it has a very post Empire feel from Star Wars. Magic users have been largely killed off, but there are still memories of what they did. Magic items are incredibly rare, so the focus is largely on abilities and things players can do. We've added a lot of races, backgrounds, and more that allow you to do several different things. The hit to magic has resulted in technology making a jump forward - there are airships, guns, and more.

CH: As a low magic setting, how does Legacy of Mana handle the two main game systems it is compatible with? For example, Pathfinder is balanced around access to magic items at higher levels where D&D 5e has moved away from this.

TO: For Pathfinder, the system mostly remains low magic and GMs are encouraged away from the usual system of hand waved trade that many trend towards, especially towards the late levels. Instead, by that point many players can create their own magical items, eating up some of their extra resources, and forcing them to be a bit more intelligent with their gameplay. In part, we've put this in place to avoid the so-called "rocket tag" that high level Pathfinder can quickly turn into.

For 5e, it works a bit better straight out of the box, with the capacity for players to do a variety of powerful things even without magical items.

In both, you're going to be facing enemies with magic a lot less often, and your magic users are going to face some different social challenges that are rife with roleplaying possibilities. In general, we've tried to introduce some new threats and challenges to keep the game exciting and interesting to players who are familiar with it. When you get a magic sword, we want it to feel extra precious instead of the kind of thing you'll trade away in two levels. Nothing like that one scene in The Witcher 3 where you're given a family heirloom from generations, and you quickly outstrip it and should trade it away. We want to make them precious, and for it to hurt if Iltherians destroy them on you.

CH: What can you tell me about those Legacy of Mana adventure modules?

TO: The adventure modules are going to be a set of adventures that you can pursue within the world of Imaria (that's the world for Legacy of Mana), each one giving you more information about a specific corner of the world, how it operates, and having three levels of adventure. The first one, "Murder at Hogshead Manor" is almost done being developed and we ran the first session of it at both Origins and GenCon this year to crowds that loved it. It starts with a murder at a noble family's house, and quickly spirals out into political maneuverings, fighting in the streets, and more

We have two more in the chute for that first set of modules, delivered as part of the first Kickstarter. One is going to take you to a giant tree with bug people worshipping something in the darkness, and the other is going to be about some of the things that happen when there's no local government to contend with. We've got these and a heck of a lot more that's being shown off at AetherCon.

CH: What's next from Lynnvander?

TO: Honestly: a lot. We've got tons of things on the go, but a lot of it is still under wraps. Since so much of our work is with IP holders, we have NDAs that are in place until we can talk about some of these things. We've got a couple of board games we get to announce super soon, and a major RPG project that I'm getting started on. We're hoping to really get rolling on them soon.

We just finished the ReAnimator board game Kickstarter, which I played a major part in. You can still order it for a bit yet, and it is going into fulfillment super quickly. We're very nearly done everything, including the expansions, at the time I'm writing this. We've got one more internal meeting where we're probably going to do final edits and approvals. This is the start of a partnership with Dynamite Entertainment, and we're pumped to reveal what's going to happen next for all those things.

Cowboy Bebop, Dragon Ball Z, and the Buffy expansion are all super close to heading to print, then we've got even more coming. We still have some more stuff for Legacy of Mana in the works - modules, Pathfinder, and more.



Interview by Christopher Hunt



ANVIL ALLEY





Q&A: PAUL WADE-WILLIAMS OF TRIPLE ACE GAMES

This year, I had the pleasure of putting more pestering questions to another pair of gamemakers. Paul "Wiggy" Wade-Williams, for instance, graced us with a bit of time to answer questions about his group & the wide variety of gaming products at Triple Ace Games, sure to empty your wallet and fill your shelf:

M.J. Holmes: Woof. I got a look at that catalog. Quite the selection of games – makes me afraid of a day when money is no longer an object. After almost 10 years in the biz there doesn't seem like TAG is taking a break anytime soon. Got anything new in the pipe you want to mention?

Paul 'Wiggy' Wade-Williams: There are always numerous projects in various stages of development. Our big focus right now is Iron-clads: a customizable miniatures rocketship game set in the late Victorian era. Although separate from our Rocket Race card game, they share the same heritage.

MJH: I was able to attend my first F2F gaming convention this year (TotalCon) and truly enjoyed it. Not only were the games various and fun to see, but so were the vendors. What's your schedule look like for upcoming convention attendance?

PWW: By the time this is published we'll have finished our con season for this year. The exception to that is Dragonmeet [<http://www.dragonmeet.co.uk/>], which takes place in early winter. Then we hibernate until next year.

MJH: As WotC builds on their D&D Beyond supplement, do you believe competing game suppliers need to create mobile-driven apps and materials too, or it's a niche market thing & you've got your biz sorted?

PWW: I don't think companies "need" to create apps and the like to be successful. "The next big thing" often turns out to be short-lived or niche, so we'll wait and see what happens.

MJH: Your card games look like they're fun & easy pickup games; what sets them apart from other CCGs like Magic: The Gathering or Pokémon?

PWW: If I had to pick one thing, it would be that they're not CCGs. :) Grab a box and go play!

MJH: How are they NOT collectible?! I'd collect all the sets! Are you possibly considering expansions to your card games like games such as Cards Against Humanity™ has?

PWW: Not at the moment, no. All our existing games were created as standalone games. We might one day add a few new cards for variety, but nothing that could be considered a true expansion.

MJH: The TAG store features Terrain Building Guides for free; do you think terrains and miniatures are integral for successful gaming?

PWW: Not at all. I like using minis and terrain on the table, but not every game needs them. Even when we do use minis, sometimes it's just for the "marching order," rather than in positioning in combat.

MJH: I've seen the title Sundered Skies brought up in forums I frequent; if I were to go looking for a game would I see elements of spelljammer™ like I read a lot of players mention, or is this a truly stand-alone setting?

PWW: There is an element of Spelljammer in that Sundered Skies involves flying ships moving between islands (rather than planets), but it's definitely a standalone setting and has a unique feel, rather than being D&D in space.

MJH: I see your products reach into the Cthulhu Mythos & Victorian Era also with a wide grip; do you believe Leagues of Gothic Horror could be crossed with other settings like Rippers or Gaslight or does it have the content to stand alone?

PWW: It has more than enough content to stand alone. The core book just by itself covers every aspect of Gothic Horror, and the supplements expand into focused areas for those who want more information. It's also not a Savage Worlds product, so crossovers would

require the GM do so some work. Of course, all the background material is system neutral.

MJH: Gaming podcasts and recorded sessions appear to be more and more propagated. We're looking forward to several live events during Aethercon VI. Do you have a podcast or are you looking to develop one?

PWW: A simple no for this one. :) I don't have time to look at other people's podcasts, yet alone produce one.

MJH: Let's see, Gothic horror, fantasy, steampunk, Mother Goose; what genre is left for TAG to tap into they haven't already or would want to?

PWW: We've also done sci-fi and pulp, so we've covered most of the major genres. We've no plans to introduce new genres to the line, but we may devise a new setting for one of the genres we're known for – like we have for steampunk by adding Leagues of Cthulhu.

MJH: Right, curiosity has the best of me. I sense a story behind the nickname. 'Wiggy'?

PWW: Alas, you shall be disappointed! It was first given me when I was about 8 years old and he's stuck for the past four decades. No idea where it originated, but possibly a derivative of Willy from Williams.

MJH: Everyone I interview gets a curveball question; batter up:

What's the worst song/soundtrack to dispatch Elder Gods by?

PWW: "Everything I Do, I Do it for You" by Bryan Adams is a song so terrible that it will drive a Great Old One away but would cause massive sanity loss in mortals hearing it.

-§-

I concur. My thanks to Paul Wade-Williams for his time and to my readers for theirs. If you'd like more information about Triple Ace Games or want to check out their catalog, go to: www.TripleAceGames.com



Interviewing Mr. Wade-Williams is M.J. Holmes; Author of Epic Fantasy novels "Tyme And Yon Serpent" and "Once Upon Tun'Rummal" with more of the series in development. He is also an illustrator for Beanie's Epics' "Camp Count*Down" (A picture book for toddlers learning to count).

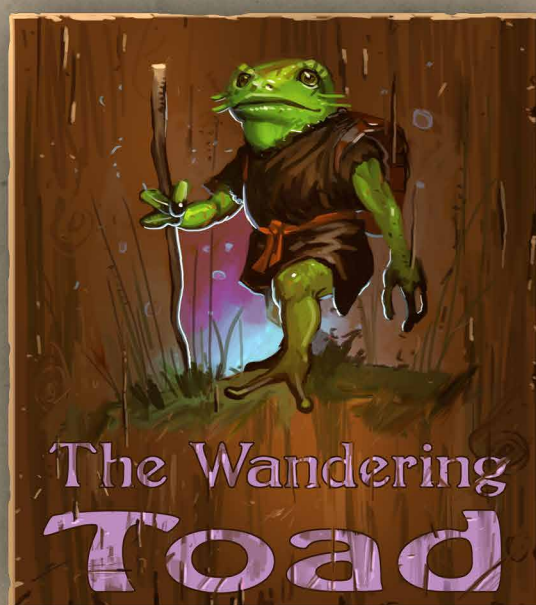
This interview and other ramblings are available at Holmes' blog and review website: WhenRealityBurns.weebly.com



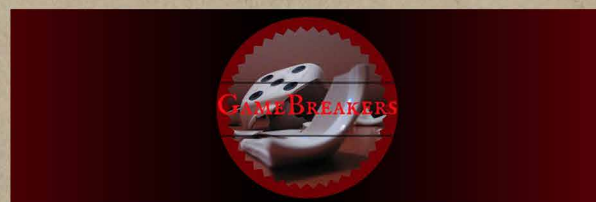
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FUNNIEST GAMING STORY EVER

The Vampire and the Car Bomb

By OSK on Roll20

One of the best things about roleplaying is having a good laugh with everyone involved. Sometimes we laugh about events happening in game. Other times, hilarious inside jokes are made after a campaign is over. This moment is both.

I had a "storyteller" once tell the party that he was going to give each of player an entire week to do whatever desired. This was a White Wolf, World of Darkness, Vampire the Masquerade roleplay game in a modern setting. We happened to be a group of newly sired, misfit vampires in the dark city of New Orleans. The party had a heartbreaking socialite, a grizzled professor, a sleazy police officer and a paranoid, mafia wannabe. I played the last character.

As a player, I've always enjoyed playing an out of the archetype box kind of character and as a GM, I always encourage my players to create characters that are more than just a roleplay trope. This character was ugly, inside and out, but wanted to get the girl. He was socially awkward but wanted to be well-liked. He was a lackey as a human and only a thug at best as a neonate vampire. His terrible relationships in life made him paranoid and untrusting. The undead life of a vampire made it worse.

My character was good at some stuff though. He was a great driver, mechanic and loved all things that exploded or could be rigged to explode. This was all thanks to an early obsession with action movies specifically those with cool cat, crime lords as protagonists. So, when asked what my character would do with a full week of prep time, I answered, "I turn my car into a bomb." I expressed this in complete frankness with no motive in mind but the GM just looked at me with a smile.

The fun part about this was that the rest of the party had no idea what each character was doing during that week. We all had discussions in private with the storyteller on what was being done. My session was the shortest. It included several difficult roles and I managed to succeed them all. I explained that my character, Vincent, would focus on this task with the highest of obsession. Vincent would only stop to rest on the ground next to the car in the overly locked down garage until the job was done.

At the end of the private session, Vincent had successfully rigged the party's only means of transportation into a remotely detonated bomb. Not only that, he also managed to fix the dinged-up car by adding reinforced windows and paneling, repainting it and tuning up its engine. When the party reconvened, some members had made contacts while the others collected resources to share. My character simply revealed a repaired and "fully loaded" vehicle but purposefully left out the part about the bomb. Personally, I didn't expect to use it and not on a party member. I was wrong about both.

About a month later, each game session had become more and more tense as certain players were pitted against each other due to honest character decisions. Finally, the party was at a climax when the dirty cop had made the choice to backstab the old professor. At this point in the story, this was the only true companion Vincent had ever made in his entire life that he could actual trust. My character was infuriated but was helpless to find a means to avenge his friend. However, an opportunity formed as the face of the party convinced the cop to be picked up by Vincent for a meeting to discuss allegiances. I smiled slyly and so did the storyteller.

On the way, my character stopped the car and had told the cop to stay in the vehicle until he returned with another passenger. The cop believed the story and stayed. Before I continue, I must explain that in the World of Darkness, vampires have special abilities. The cop had exceptionally quick reflexes and increased agility. Vincent could hide objects on his person that no one could ever find. These

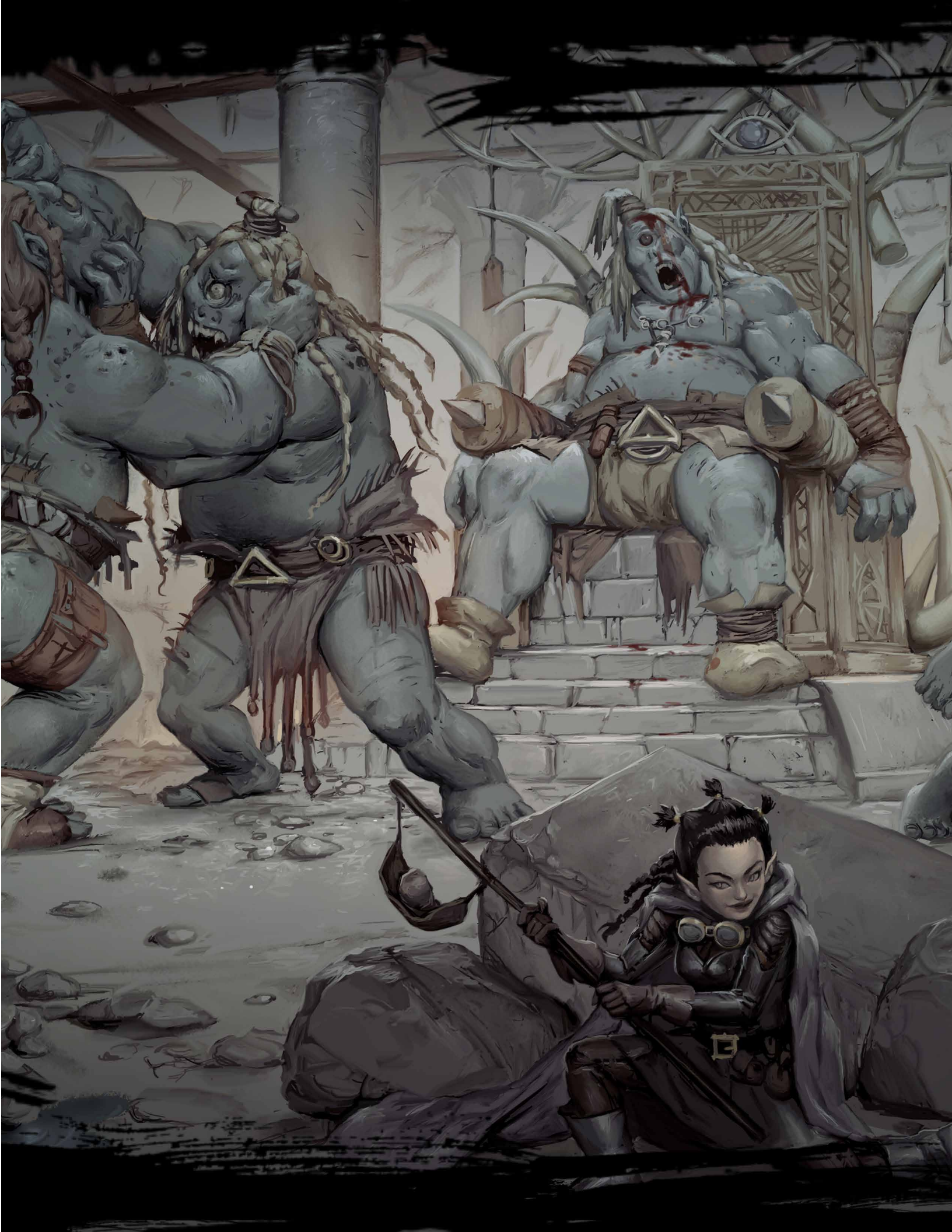
supernatural skills are just two of very many useful vampire capabilities. When my character reached the door of the rundown house, he turned to look at the cop who was still in the vehicle that was parked on the other side of the road. After he had grabbed the car alarm remote in his pocket, Vincent locked the doors and pressed the bottom combination that triggered the bomb.

The cop was given a roll to sense danger. He succeeded but was only quick enough to take off his seatbelt and try the car door. Unfortunately for the him, this car did not have properly working safety locks as my character had removed them about two weeks prior. The cop's quick reflexes gave him just enough time to see Vincent smile and flick him off before the boom. The explosion was a surprise to everyone except for the persons privy to a private discussion a little over a month back. It was immediately followed by an exclaimed "you mother *****" and laughing by all.

In-game, my character was without a car but had obtained the explosive lifestyle he had coveted. In real life, the storyteller and players all gained a story that still brings us to hysterics ten years later. Despite the tension filled sessions and the backstabbing murders in that game, I'm happy to say we're stronger friends because of it.

TECH CREDITS





The background is a deep purple space filled with stars. A bright white starburst with four-pointed rays is centered behind the text. Several planets are visible: a small orange planet in the top right, a brown planet with a blue ring in the middle left, and a purple planet in the bottom right.

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